

1993

# Safe Zone Concern and Response

Diane Goodman

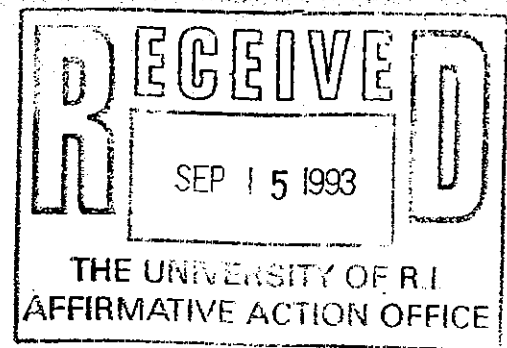
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Diane Goodman  
Affirmative Action  
Carlotti  
15 September, 1993

Dear Diane,

I just received your memo of August 31 from the Committee to Eliminate Homophobia and Heterosexism. I am with you most of the way. I think that you and the committee have made important and significant progress in this area. As you probably know from my record, I have always tried to be as supportive as possible to efforts to make this campus as open, tolerant, and accepting as it can be.

On the other hand, I am troubled by the "Safe Zone Campaign, maybe because I do not fully understand it. Should I have a sticker? What exactly would putting a Safe Zone sticker on my office door indicate, and what would it commit me to? By NOT having a sticker on my door am I in some unintentional way declaring to the university community that I am unsupportive? Are there other segments of the university community for whom similar Safe Zones should be established? Or should labeling efforts of this sort be abandoned in favor of other activities that educate and bring the campus together without requiring people to publicly "witness" to some aspect of their basic human goodness.

Please advise. For me—and many other faculty colleagues—these are serious issues.

Sincerely,

October 22, 1993

Professor  
Department of History  
University of Rhode Island  
Kingston, RI 02881

Dear Professor :

Thank you for your thoughtful letter inquiring about the "Safe Zone" campaign.

The "Safe Zone" campaign was started in the wake of mounting opposition to the rights of gays and lesbians in our society. Partly as a result of the mismanaged Clinton administration effort to end discrimination against gays and lesbians in the military, the attacks on gays, lesbians and bisexuals have been escalating, making our "Safe Zone" campaign more necessary than ever. Brutal aberrations such as gay bashing, that begin in large urban areas, eventually find their way to even the most peaceful university campuses as young people take their prejudices with them to college. While we have not had any major problems at the University of Rhode Island, young gay men, lesbians and bisexuals do not feel safe in coming out here, nor do many professors and staff members feel comfortable publicly identifying themselves. In the best of all possible worlds, we could depend on the good natures of the majority of people in the university community, but these are tumultuous times and the creation of "Safe Zones," while superfluous to those who support justice and equality for everyone, may create a margin of safety for those who feel threatened.

Dante Alighieri wrote that "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those, who in time of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality." Our Safe Zone campaign seeks to give the members of the URI community an opportunity to stand up for the basic right of safety for everyone, particularly those who are at great risk if they dare to reveal themselves as gays or lesbians.

Putting up a "Safe Zone" sticker only indicates that one has chosen to be actively supportive and open to gays, lesbians and bisexuals. It is not meant to imply that someone who chooses not to display the sticker is necessarily homophobic.

Thank you for your expression of concern for the "Safe Zone" campaign. We appreciate the time and effort that you took in composing such a thoughtful letter. If only others who had questions about the program would make such an effort!

All the best,

Diane Goodman